Boris Nemtsov and the reproduction of the regional intelligentsia

Boris Nemtsov and the Reproduction of Regional Intelligentsia[1]

Abstract

This essay attempts to situate Nemtsov as an individual in the broader sweep of Russia's regional—and national—history. To what extent is the democratic development of particular regions down to the force, drive, and charisma of particular transformational leaders? And, to what extent is Nemtsov himself a product of the particular social milieu conducive to the genesis of the public-minded, self-sacrificing crusader for common good? If regional microcosms matter for understanding the genesis of the democratic leader, what are those elements of the longue durée of regional cultural, social, economic, and political fabrics that might help explain the phenomenon of Nemtsov? And how can Nemtsov's own life help illuminate what aspects of regional histories we should study to explain the paradox of democratic resilience in particular regions and the potential of these regions to help transform national politics? This essay attempts to provide some answers to these questions by discussing the historical origins of, and the puzzle of inter-temporal, political regime-transcending reproduction of, human capital variations in Russia's regions, and specifically those related to the development of institutions of learning and science.

[1] A short version of this essay appeared as a LSE European Politics and Public Policy blogpost (Lankina 2015). Available at: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/03/02/russian-citizens-owe-it-to-boris-nemtsov-to-keep-the-hope-of-democracy-in-russia-alive/

Introduction

I first heard of Boris Nemtsov when I was a young Russian graduate student in America in the mid-1990s contemplating pursuing a PhD in Russian regional politics. For a new, post-Kremlinologist, generation of political scientists it was the phenomenon of leaders like Nemtsov that made the study of Russian provincial politics fascinating and exciting. In post-Soviet hyper-federalist Russia of the early years of the Boris Yel'tsin presidency, sub-national regions quickly emerged as powerful players in their own right, shaping regional and national politics. As a governor of Nizhniy Novgorod region, still only in his early thirties (he was only thirty two when he became governor), Nemtsov was already a star—well before he entered national politics as Deputy Prime Minister. Nemtsov led the democratic transformation of the Nizhniy Novgorod region, nurturing an atmosphere of political openness, attracting foreign investment, and supporting independent media and civil society. To scholars of Russian regional politics, Nemtsov's governorship of Nizhegorodskaya is associated with the most vibrant period in the history of Russian federalism. I hesitate to use the expression "golden age" of federalism because the Yel'tsin-era federal relations were associated with ad hocism and preferential politically-motivated deals with regional bosses that in some cases helped promote regional authoritarianism, nepotism, and corruption. Yet, regions like Nizhniy stood out as islands of sub-national openness, while governors like Nemtsov helped keep in check excessive concentration of power in the national executive and shaped national policy and public opinion. (In 1996, he organised a signature campaign against the war in Chechnya, collecting one million signatures in the Nizhniy Novgorod region on a petition to President Yel'tsin and calling on other regions to support his initiative) (McFaul and Petrov 1998, p. 698). President Vladimir Putin's recentralisation drive of the early 2000s ensured that even the hitherto politically open regions would turn into dependencies of the Kremlin delivering blatantly fraudulent electoral support to the national incumbent (Lankina and Skovoroda 2015). Back in the 1990s however, the more politically competitive regions could, and did, shape national political landscapes. While the Rakhimovs, the Shaymievs, or the Ilyumdzhinovs—long-serving presidents of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, and Kalmykia of that era will be associated in the public mind with patrimonialism and neo-Soviet sub-national authoritarianism (Kahn 2002; Lankina 2004), Nemtsov will be remembered as a democratic, public-minded, governor.

This essay attempts to situate Nemtsov as an individual in the broader sweep of Russia's regional—and national—history. To what extent is the democratic development of

particular regions down to the force, drive, and charisma of particular transformational leaders? And, to what extent is Nemtsov himself a product of the particular social milieu conducive to the genesis of the public-minded, self-sacrificing crusader for common good? If regional microcosms matter for understanding the genesis of the democratic leader, what are those elements of the longue durée of regional cultural, social, economic, and political fabrics that might help explain the phenomenon of Nemtsov? And how can Nemtsov's own life help illuminate what aspects of regional histories we should study to explain the paradox of democratic resilience in particular regions and the potential of these regions to help transform national politics? This essay attempts to provide some answers to these questions. At the outset, I should say that I have never met Boris Yefimovich, nor am I familiar with all the known details of his biography. I am approaching this topic as a political scientist specialising on Russia's regional politics and as someone who had come to realise that to understand the post-1991 dynamics of regional political development we have to go beyond the preoccupation with the political leadership choices made in the post-communist period, and beyond even the structural variations imposed on the regions during the Soviet period. Rather, we should delve deeper into history, to explore how pre-communist developments may have already set regions on variable developmental and, ultimately, democratic trajectories; how these developments interacted with Soviet developmental goals and projects; and how these complex historical processes in turn continue to account for Russia's regional governance variations. Rather than emphasizing political and economic institutions as being central to the long-term reproduction of patterns of development, as would be consistent with a prominent strand of recent economic and political theorizing (Acemoglu, Johnson et al. 2001), my approach is leaning more towards the human capital persistence and reproduction area of recent and established scholarship in economics, sociology, and political science (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Glaeser, Porta et al. 2004). Taking this approach endows our hero both with a strong agency—and power to shape regional (and national) destinies—while also highlighting how the genesis of the particular values, the mind-set, and actions that we associate with one particular individual is perhaps more likely in particular regional settings, and less so, in others. In what follows, I begin by outlining the historical elements of regional development that ought to be considered as important drivers of the reproduction of the observed variations in regional governance over time. I then situate the phenomenon of Boris Nemtsov in the particular constellations of regional variables propitious for nurturing non-conformist opinion—, notably the development of Nizhniy's centres of scientific research in which he studied and worked—, while also highlighting the

democratic proclivities of the Yaroslavl' region, in which Nemtsov was elected as regional assembly deputy in 2013. A concluding section links the historical discussion about regional human capital to the wider debates about the role of the critical intelligentsia in keeping the hope of democracy in Russia alive.

The Longue Durée of Regional Histories

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it did not take long for scholars to observe that the substantial democratic variations that emerged early on among Soviet-block states, are also characteristics of Russia's *sub*-national regions (Gelman, Ryzhenkov et al. 2003; Lankina 2015; Lankina, Libman et al. 2016; Lankina and Voznaya 2015; Lankina 2004; McMann and Petrov 2000). In fact, it was the persona of the media darling Boris Nemtsov—the young governor who shaped the democratic politics of the Nizhniy Novgorod region—that made these variations appear to be ever more glaring. The democratic politics of Nizhegorodskaya under Nemtsov's governorship—however messy and scandal-ridden (McFaul and Petrov 1998)—nevertheless stood in stark contrast to the neo-Soviet, patrimonial, and corrupt regimes in the "ethnic" republics of Bashkortostan or Kalmykia; or to the conservative, nostalgic-Soviet, paternalistic politics in what quickly became known as the "Red belt," "Russian"—that is, non-ethnically defined—*oblasti*. The ground-breaking indices of regional democracy composed by the Scholars Nikolay Petrov, Alexey Titkov codified—in an innovative and highly systematic way—what was becoming known anecdotally about the democratic or authoritarian proclivities of particular regions (Petrov 2005; Petrov and Titkov 2013). Nizhny already emerged in these indices close to the very top end of Russia's regional democratic achievers. The 1990s was the height of the dominance of transitology as the leading explanatory paradigm accounting for the emerging democratic variations among post-Soviet states. Scholarship on Russia's regions influenced by the transitology paradigm tended to explain the emerging variations in regional governance in terms of pacts and choices made among key individuals in regional leadership positions (Gelman, Ryzhenkov et al. 2003). Others, however, were early on pointing to the significant Soviet-era structural legacies that may account for the particular regional elite constellations and the choices that these elites make in the context of democratic transition (Stoner-Weiss 1997). Again, Nizhniy Novgorod featured in some of these analyses as a region in which the Soviet-era industrial structure made consensual-style, democratic, politics more likely than in those regions where such Soviet-imposed structural preconditions had

been lacking. More recent scholarship on post-communist democracy and development has encouraged scholars to transcend their preoccupation with "temporally shallow"(Kitschelt 2003) causes and to more systematically explore how pre-communist histories might have a bearing on the long-term reproduction of variables that could be linked to spatial variations in democratic governance (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006; Kotkin and Beissinger 2014; T. Lankina 2012; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013). Much of this literature has tended to analyse national-level variations (but see (T. Lankina 2012)). Furthermore, recent research into the long-term influences of *pre*-communist legacies on post-communist democracy has mostly focused on Central Europe's states. Russia has been curiously side-lined in this work, at best featuring as an observation in large-n national-level, quantitative, analyses.

Barring a handful of recent studies by economic historians into particular aspects of regional development, such as serfdom (Finkel, Gehlbach et al. 2015), or the zemstvo movement (Nafziger 2011), there has been little systematic sub-national scholarship on how the pre-communist development of Russia's provinces could help us explain democratic—or autocratic—resilience in the regions. Research to date has tended to concentrate on a handful of regions; or to explore causal mechanisms contained within a particular historical era.[2] There is an even greater paucity of research into how regional pre-communist histories may have interacted with the communist project, and how the complex multi-layered historical processed might in turn shed light on the developmental trajectories of particular regions.

The specific feature of Russia's regional development that I would like to highlight here is the inter-temporal resilience of human capital—and the institutions associated with the production and reproduction of human and cultural capital—transcending the distinct tsarist, communist, and post-communist periods and regime types. Already in the early 19th century, some regions of the Russian Empire that are now part of the Russian Federation possessed the beginnings of what would become some of the Empire's more advanced schooling systems. In the course of the 19th century, universities were also established in several of the *gubernii* corresponding to the territories of the present-day Russian Federation. These institutions were of course the manifestations of wider modernization processes in tsarist Russia, which affected the various territories in a highly uneven fashion. These modernization variations had been conditioned by a complex bundle of variables ranging from the differences in the practices associated with peasant bondage; to geographic location in proximity to key transport arteries; to the discovery of important natural resources and

[2] Such as whether serfdom had the effect of deterring peasant rebellion in imperial Russia (Finkel et al. 2015).

concomitant processes of industrialisation in particular *gubernii* (Brooks 1985; Eklof 1986; Leonard 2011; Moon 2002; Nafziger 2011; Treadgold 1976). They were also conditioned by exogenous factors preceding industrialisation, as would be the case with German settlers who had been invited by Catherine the Great to settle in the Volga area (*povolzhye*), and later settled also in Siberia, beginning in the 18th century (Kabuzan 2003; Keim 2006; Koch 1977; T. V. Lankina 2012; Schippan and Striegnitz 1992; Stricker 1994). These German communities founded superb primary schools and gymnasia, while also providing the human capital pool for the nascent university system (as did other ethnic Germans, who had not been descendants of the settlers, but who had come to colonise Russia's higher educational and research establishments as scholars and who are given credit for the Germanization of the Empire's University system and research (Graham 1967). When reading the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead*[3]; or the explorer George Kennan's powerful *Siberia and the Exile System*, one is also reminded of the role of political exiles in creating small groups of cosmopolitan and highly educated communities—some transient, others leaving a profound mark on the local social-cultural milieu—in the most climatically harsh and undeveloped fringes of the Russian Empire (Dostoevsky 1982; Kennan 1891). Consequently, as is illustrated by the results of the first Imperial Census of 1897, at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution, Russia featured glaring spatial variations in literacy levels among its provinces. Furthermore, while some *gubernii* were only beginning to develop universal basic schooling, others already possessed world-class institutions of learning and research.

To illustrate these patterns, I provide some statistics on literacy in imperial Russia's *gubernii* and indicate where the more or less literate provinces ended up on regional democracy indices in the 1990s and early 2000s (Appendix, Table 1). (For a detailed discussion of these patterns and presentation of the relevant data, see Lankina, Libman et al. 2016). The literacy statistics are sourced from Russia's first imperial census of 1897 (Troynitskiy 1905), while the regional democracy data are compiled by Petrov and Titkov (2013). In developmental scholarship, female literacy in particular is considered to be an important indicator of human capital and modernization considering the significance of

[3] Thus, in *The House of the Dead* (Zapiski iz myortvogo doma) Dostoevsky's character narrating the story writes: "V sibirskikh gorodakh chasto vstrechayutsya uchitelya iz ssyl'nykh pereselntsev; imi ne brezgayut. Uchat zhe oni preimushchestvenno frantsuzskomu yazyku, stol' neobkhodimomu na poprishche zhizni i o kotorom bez nikh v otdalyonnykh krayakh Sibiri ne imeli by i ponyatiya" ("In Siberian towns one often meets teachers from amongst the exiled settlers; the local citizens are not squeamish [towards these people]. They mostly teach the French language, so important in life, and without them [these teachers] about which [French language] in the distant parts of Siberia one would not have any idea" (translated by author, p. 6).

literacy and education for female participation in the labour force, reproductive decisions, and the likelihood of transmission of values conducive to educational aspirations to children (Lankina and Getachew 2013). Unsurprisingly, we observe that regions that had been most literate and ended up with comparatively high democracy scores (Petrov and Titkov 2013) are Moscow (56.3 overall literacy and 42.3 female literacy) and St. Petersburg (62.6 overall literacy and 51.5 female literacy). What is less known however is that, for instance, Samara and Yaroslavl', which had been considered among Russia's most politically open regions in the post-communist period, also had among the highest literacy levels and particularly female literacy, in the imperial period (22.1 and 14 percent; and 36 and 24 percent, respectively). In territories that had been during the imperial period part of what constitutes the present-day Nizhegorodskaya *oblast*, the overall literacy rate was 22 percent and female literacy was 11 percent. These figures are modest if one compares Russia to Western European states with far higher literacy levels at the turn of the 19th-early 20th centuries, yet they are significantly above literacy rates in a large number of imperial Russia's other *gubernii*.

Now let us look at regions that had been among the least literate in the imperial period, in terms of both overall literacy and female literacy. The North Caucasus republics clearly stand out—with literacy of less than 15 percent and with only 6 percent females listed as literate in some regions (Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia)—, though among the less literate regions one also finds the Siberian territories like Omsk and Novosibirsk that remained comparatively under-developed at the time of the 1897 census when it comes to overall levels of human capital (as distinct from the educational credentials of the small communities of exiles or tsarist administrators), but have been considered comparatively democratic in the post-communist period. What is also interesting is that Central Russian regions that in terms of their post-communist electoral geography had been characterised as belonging to the "red belt" of conservative regions with paternalistic political tendencies also had at the time of the 1897 census low levels of literacy, female literacy in particular. For instance, in Orel, the overall and female literacy rates were 17.6 and 7.3 percent, respectively. In the "red belt" region of Briansk, overall literacy was 16.6 and female literacy was only 6.9 percent.

Clearly, not all regions fit the pattern of high imperial literacy-high post-communist democracy, considering that a host of potential variables may impinge on regional democratic development. Nevertheless, systematic statistical analysis of the links between human capital and regional democratic variations suggests (Lankina, Libman et al. 2016) that the above-discussed patterns are non-random, in other words, that past literacy does have an effect on

subsequent communist-era modernization, as well as on post-communist regional regime patterns.

The spatial variations in human capital were to pose significant challenges to the rulers of the new Bolshevik state who were desperate to not only stamp out illiteracy and develop more advanced forms of education throughout the country, but to find sufficiently qualified cadre—the so-called red teachers (*krasnye uchitelya*)—to assist the Bolsheviks in the attainment of these noble objectives (Varlamenkov 2008). They also complicated the pursuit of the overall objective of the country's rapid modernization.

The underlying assumption in some of the scholarship on Soviet regional development has been that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 put a break on the reproduction of the above-discussed developmental—and, most importantly for this analysis, human capital,—variations under the new order; and that the regional variations that we observe now are products of the spatially uneven application of the USSR's industrialisation drive (Fainsod 1970). In fact, much of the earlier scholarship on communist-period regional development has tended to emphasise Soviet accomplishments in eliminating illiteracy, in building higher education, and in abolishing, or at least significantly reducing, the massive social inequalities that existed in the Tsarist period.

Thus, the claim of the creation of a New Soviet Man had been in some ways unreflectively internalised by scholars writing about Soviet modernization accomplishments. So has been apparently the notion that a *new* Soviet intelligentsia had been created, that is, an intelligentsia ostensibly untarnished by association with the *old* intelligentsia of educated or more or less privileged origin from the previous, tsarist order (Fainsod 1970; Rigby 1990; De Witt 1961). Yet, the undisputable record of social elevation of large numbers of hitherto underprivileged and uneducated members of the lower orders—and their metamorphosis into the *new* intelligentsia—has often tended to obscure the immense role of the literate, better-educated, and often (though not always) relatively privileged members of the *old* intelligentsia in this process, and of the corresponding eventual acquisition of respectable status of this *old* intelligentsia and their descendants under the Soviet regime.

The Soviets in fact built on the tsarist regime's modernization foundations, employing the educated strata of the past order to further their grand social engineering and economic modernization projects (Lankina, Libman et al. 2016). The historical narratives about Bolshevik rule are littered with images of vandalism and destruction—of palaces, churches, and mansions. Yet, one story that features less prominently in these narratives is about the scores of institutions manufacturing human capital that the Bolsheviks unashamedly

appropriated, preserved, patched up, and expanded to serve the regime's ambitious developmental objectives. It is little surprise then that territories corresponding to imperial *gubernii* with high concentrations of institutions of basic and advanced learning, or otherwise boasting high human capital development due to the long-term imperial-era modernization processes, also emerged as hubs of scientific endeavour and advanced industry in the communist period. So did those with perhaps more modest claim to being at the forefront of imperial education and scholarship—for instance, Ivanovo—but which due to the exogenous shock of war (First World War during the Imperial period; and Secord World War during the Soviet period) ended up playing host, at first temporarily, and then permanently, to leading centres of learning or industry that had been evacuated from other regions for strategic reasons (Lankina, Libman et al. 2016).

Populating these institutions were real people, whose motivations for serving the communist regime were complex, but who played significant roles in the USSR's modernization endeavour. Until the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, available records allow us with some degree of certainty to establish the extent of reproduction of generally the literate strata and indeed the intellectual crème de la crème of the imperial academic establishments in the institutions or learning, scientific, and cultural endeavour under the Bolshevik regime. For instance, we know that a significant proportion of gymnasia teachers, as indeed academicians in such top imperial-era establishments like the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, had previously worked in those imperial academic institutions and had been appropriated by the new regime to advance literacy, higher education, or science (Graham 1967; Varlamenkov 2008). The purges of course had an enormous toll on these educated strata of Soviet society (Conquest 2008; Ellman 2002; Rosefielde 1997). Not only did the purges represent the physical extermination of hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens, but they also displaced and uprooted scores of others. Yet, statistics compiled by T. H. Rigby provide some indication as to the degree of what may be termed post-purge "restoration" of individuals with "undesirable" social origins in party and governance structures and in professional occupations (Rigby 1968). For instance, the high proportion of "scientists" among post-purge, 1938-1939, party recruits suggests that many would have obtained their education under the old order—this would be in line with the policy of abandonment of rigid class-based criteria in admission to the party, and in advancement in the professions, by the late 1930s (Rigby 1968, p. 222). Analysing the imperial backgrounds of Soviet academics, the Russian historian Sergey Vokov notes: "The scientific milieu … corresponded the least to the Soviet understandings of 'correct' social origins"; this observation applied in particular to

"physics, mathematics, and medicine" (author translation from the Russian language).[4] Generally, some indication of the inter-generational reproduction of educational status, values, and preferences is provided by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alex Inkeles and other leading scholars of Soviet politics, who documented the impetus of those who had been well-educated in the imperial era to transmit educational advantage to their offspring—even if—, under the new order—, in new form, name, and substance (Fitzpatrick 1979; Inkeles 1950; Lane 1973). The result had been a considerable degree of reproduction of social and professional identifications—with a corresponding set of value orientations—between two apparently vastly contrasting imperial and communist regimes (Volkov 1999).

In a recent paper, Tomila Lankina, Alexander Libman, and Anastassia Obydenkova (2016), conceptualise the above-discussed social repositioning of the imperial regime's educated strata under the new communist regime as a form of *appropriation*. Whether these individuals and their descendants became genuine converts to Marxist-Leninist faith, or simply professed enthusiasm for the new regime to get on with their lives and careers, many ended up joining the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In fact, as a large body of sovietological scholarship testifies, the educated, upwardly mobile strata tended to be over-represented in the CPSU in proportion to the share of these groups in the USSR's population (Djilas 1983; Rigby 1968). Some public opinion surveys conducted in the post-soviet period (and in various other post-communist states) suggest that, contrary to expectations of modernization theorizing, the highly educated former communist party members ended up espousing values less democratic than those who had never been party members during the communist period (Dalton 1994; Finifter and Mickiewicz 1992; Miller, Hesli et al. 1997; Rohrschneider 1994). These data might indicate that there was something about socialization within the party that had an undemocratic effect on value orientations; it may also point to the undemocratic effects of *service* to the communist regime more generally insofar as party membership may proxy for involvement with the political-managerial and governance side of Soviet professions (Libman and Obydenkova 2013, 2015). Paradoxically, those very same areas of present-day Russia that had been rich in human capital—and democratic potential—before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, ended up becoming the more robust suppliers of educated party cadre; this in turn, as Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova conjecture (2016), would have a *subversive* effect on the democratic trajectories of particular regions in the post-communist period.

[4] He writes: "Nauchnaya sreda iz vsekh professional'nykh grupp intellektual'nogo sloya, po-vidimomu, v naimen'shey stepeni otvechala sovetskim predstavleniyam o 'pravil'nom' sotsial'nom sostave."

So, if the *appropriation and subversion* thesis is correct, how, then, do we begin to explain why not all educated strata engaged in regime-reinforcing ideological dogma and professions? And what kind of a regional milieu would have been least conducive to the processes of democratic subversion-through-service discussed above? To address this question, I turn again to T.H. Rigby (1968; 1990), whose work has been rather unjustly neglected in recent scholarship on the historical legacies of communism, but who provides the in my view still unsurpassed analysis of the professional, demographic, and social characteristics of the members of CPSU over time. As noted above, the highly educated professionals had been drawn to the party. Academia and research were not immune to this trend insofar as many academics and scientists represented the party's "lay" membership—uninvolved with the party apparat, but possessing membership cards, usually for the purposes of career advancement. Specific branches of scholarship however stood out in their comparatively low statistics for membership in the USSR's "leading and guiding force." It is well-known that the hard sciences in particular had served as breeding grounds for the USSR's dissident movement. Rigby's statistics confirm that certain branches of scholarly endeavour had been indeed comparatively low party-saturated. The party records data that he cites are for the late 1940s, but they provide some illustration of what continued to represent a trend in party membership rates among scientists over time. For instance, while in 1947, a mere 17 percent of engineering professors were CPSU members, 58 professors in the social sciences and philosophy possessed CPSU membership cards (Rigby 1968, p. 445).

Here, as the sociologist Georgi Derluguian notes, an element of self-selection is likely to have been at work, as those most critically-inclined towards the regime had been perhaps more likely to join the least-ideologically indoctrinated professions (Derluguian 2005, p. 110). Rigby also speculates that "first-rate" scientists valued by the regime for their contribution to the USSR's stellar achievements had been perhaps also comparatively immune from the pressures of membership—and the administrative burdens that come with ritualised regime-reinforcing "public" activities associated with being a Komsomol or party member (Rigby 1968, p. 446). Finally, the Russian historian Sergei Volkov highlights the element of the inter-generational reproduction of a particular mind-set amongst descendants of pre-Soviet academic intelligentsia that continued to discreetly hold on to their values while labouring in scientific environments far removed from the "ideological vanguard of communist construction." He writes:

> Despite the artificial nature of the soviet intellectual strata in general, in its midst had been preserved, or even newly formed, isolated strata and groups qualitatively different—and better—than the rest… I mean first and foremost the academic milieu and the sphere of military-technical research and development. In a number of the branches of these spheres, as is well-known, can be found the intellectual potential of world quality, at least in a professional sense. Having found themselves for a variety of reasons… outside of the sphere of rigid ideological control, these strata had partially succeeded in conserving the features characteristic of the normal intellectual elite. It is also characterised by a comparatively high level of self-reproduction. This is also the strata that had partially succeeded in preserving certain traditions of the pre-soviet intellectual layer of society.[5]

I conjecture that the social milieu propitious for democracy in post-communist Russia would be one situated around the kinds of islands of non-conformism discussed above, which would be in turn conditioned by the long-term historical legacies of development in particular regions; these islands would be also most immune to the pressures of communist-era *appropriation* that may have been more strongly felt by other comparatively well-developed areas. These would be also the kinds of spatial islands of critical thought and opinion that would generate support structures for Russia's post-communist democratic movement. In the next section, I illustrate the various insights that I have sketched out above, about the temporal, spatial, and social dimension of the reproduction of imperial and communist legacies, based on the example of the Nizhniy Novgorod region, while also briefly highlighting the conditions similarly propitious for democratic resilience in the Yaroslavl' region, where Nemtsov performed his final formal political role as deputy to the regional legislature.

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[5] The original Russian text reads: "Nesmotrya na protivoestestvennyy kharakter sovetskogo intellektual'nogo sloya v tselom, v ego sostave sokhranilis' ili dazhe sforminovalis' otdel'nye sloi i gruppy, otlichayushchiesya v luchshuyu storonu kachestvom nekotorykh svoikh chlenov. Rech idyot v pervuyu ochered' ob akademicheskoy srede i sfere voenno-tekhnicheskikh razrabotok. V ryade ikh otrasley sosredotochen, kak izvestno, intellektual'nyy potentsial, ne ustupayushchiy zarubezhnomu urovnyu po krayney mere v professional'nom plane. Okazavshis' po raznym prichinam… vne sfery zhyostkogo ideologicheskogo kontrolya, eta sreda sumela otchasti sokhranit' cherty, svoystvennye normal'noy intellektual'noy elite. Ona otlichayetsya i dostatochno vysokim urovnem samovosproizvodstva. Ona zhe otchasti sokhranila dazhe nekotorye traditsii dosovetskogo intellektual'nogo sloya."

The Nizhniy Novgorod Region and Boris Nemtsov

Territories of what is now the Nizhniy Novgorod region had been in the XIV century part of the independent Nizhegorodsko-Suzdal'skoe Principality. Located at the intersection of the Volga and Oka river Basins and key transport arteries linking central Russia with Urals and Siberia, the Nizhniy Novgorod City by the 19th century emerged as a leading centre of trade and commerce. From 1817, it played host to Russia's largest Makaryevskaya Trade Fair. In the Soviet period, Nizhniy Novgorod became a "hyper-industrial" region, surpassed only by the City of Moscow and the Moscow and Sverdlovsk *oblasti* in industrial production levels. While the region is well-known for its machine-building industries, a third of its industrial production during the Soviet period had been in the defence sector. The Nizhniy Novgorod region had been off-limits to foreigners during the Soviet period because it housed the highly secretive "numbered" towns like Arzamas-16 (Sarov), which abandoned its closed status only in 1995. As had been the case with the USSR's other hubs that serviced the military-industrial complex, the Nizhniy Novgorod region became a leading centre of scientific research. By the time of the USSR's collapse, scientific research, education and services related to knowledge-production (along with culture and the arts) constituted the second largest area of employment in the *oblast*.[6]

The Lobachevsky State University, in which Nemtsov studied, started its life as the Warsaw Polytechnic Institute named after Nicholas II. It had been founded in 1898 and was among Imperial Russia's leading scientific establishments. Like the Ivanovo Polytechnic in the Ivanovo region (which ended up hosting the Riga Polytechnic Institute), the university had been evacuated to the region during the First World War. In 1916, it became Nizhniy Novgorod's "People's University." Although the Institute had been an acquisition from Imperial Russia's more advanced territories, the choice of Nizhniy as its new home had been influenced by a sustained campaign of the *guberniya* residents to raise funds for the relocation of the Institute's staff and facilities to their region. Here, the tradition of *metsenatstvo* (philanthropy) in this historically trading region played a role as Nizhniy's leading industrialists pooled funds to ensure that the project would be viable. The presence of relatively developed educational infrastructure and human capital pool, which would be leveraged during the early days of the polytechnic's relocation, also played a role in the selection of Nizhniy as the Institute's new home. When the Bolsheviks came to power, the

[6] This paragraph is based on:

Institute became the Nizhegorodsky Polytechnic Institute. In 1956, it was named after the feted Soviet mathematician Nikolay Lobachevsky.[7]

The academic institution which Boris Nemtsov joined as a student; and the Radio-physics Research Institute in which he subsequently worked as a scientist, would have been microcosms of the liberal hard sciences milieu that, as noted above, had been propitious to the nurturing of unconventional values and thought. These institutions would have been beneficiaries of the Bolshevik regime's privileged treatment of the sciences that had been introduced from the outset of Soviet rule. As early as 1921, a Central Commission for the Improvement of the Livelihoods of Scientists was created, which provided, inter alia, for special *akademicheskie payki* (academic supplements)*;* financial incentives in the form of premiums for academic publications and inventions had been also introduced. The greatest generosity had been shown towards those working in the "hard" sciences. A special 1921 decree essentially put scientists on a par with "workers" in status, which implied that they would not face discrimination due to their "undesirable," bourgeois origins; this also implied that these individuals and their offspring would not face discrimination in university admissions (or even that they would get the same preferential treatment as those ascribed a "worker" category).[8] In-depth studies of the bureaucratic politics of the USSR's leading scientific institutions—and example of which would be Loren Graham's study of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg—highlight how they remained oases for the reproduction of scientific—and cultural—capital inherited from the imperial era, despite the pressures they faced in the form of the introduction of monitoring and supervision by mediocre party *appratchiki*. Derluguian (2005, p. 110) provides an illustration of how communities of the liberal-minded would have been nurtured in institutions like the Lobachevsky University and the Radio-physics Research Institute even in the later decades of the Soviet period. The "hard" sciences represented, he writes, "the main breeding ground for liberal dissidents, . . . especially the advanced fields of nuclear research and space exploration. During the 1950s and 1970s, these scholarly communities [along with other professions like linguists] enjoyed privileged funding, exceptionally high public acclaim, and relatively unrestricted intellectual exchanges with their Western colleagues." The pursuit of such "obscure interests… beyond the focus of official Marxist-Leninist ideology… helped to

[7] http://www.unn.ru/general/brief.html; http://www.nntu.ru/content/istoriya (accessed 5 July 2015).

[8] Mervin Matthews, "Stanovlenie sistemy privilegiy v Sovetskom gosudarstve," *Skepsis* http://scepsis.net/library/id_439.html; original publication in *Voprosy istorii*, 1992, № 2-3, pp. 45-61 http://scepsis.net/library/id_439.html (accessed 30 June 2015).

foster cohesive communities with a sense of professional dignity and kinship with the intellectual community outside the USSR. It is no small matter that such disciplines normally required a familiarity with esoteric concepts and at least a basic knowledge of foreign languages, which tended to deter administrative careerists" (Derluguian 2005, pp. 110-111, cited in Lankina, Obydenkova and Libman, 2016).

The presence of a large community of intelligentsia, continuously nurtured in Nizhniy's centres of learning and research, provided important foundations for Nizhniy's *perestroika*-era democratic politics. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the origins of the region's politically-transformative societal activism could be traced to the environmental movement, which often featured the scientific intelligentsia as activists, and it is not coincidental that Nemtsov's political career began in Nizhniy's environmental campaigns of the 1980s. It is also not coincidental that in this region, a democratic politician like Nemtsov stood a chance of resisting and checking the power of the former communist *nomenklatura*. A study that ranked Russia's regions according to the degree of their involvement in EU-funded projects in the 1990s found Nizhniy Novgorod—a region formerly featuring cities that had been closed to foreigners—to be one of the most active regional participants in initiatives that involved EU-Russia civil society development and other democracy-promotion projects (Lankina 2005; Lankina and Getachew 2006, 2008). Nemtsov's sheer drive, determination, and charisma during his governorship had been undoubtedly instrumental in creating the policy windows for investment and public and private projects with external partners in the region. Yet, he also operated in a regional environment with the cultural, intellectual, and human capital that would make such politics and policies possible.

Nemtsov's subsequent career outside of Nizhniy Novgorod further supports the argument developed above, namely that particular regions are propitious for both nurturing politicians like Nemtsov, while also serving as hubs of democratic resilience attracting "refugees" with high moral and political principle from more democratically "hostile" national or regional environments. I have noted already that in the imperial period, territories forming part of what is now Yaroslavl' region were at the very top of imperial Russia's literacy achievers, next only to Moscow and St. Petersburg and surrounding districts now in the Moscow and Leningrad *oblasti*; the scholars Nikolay Petrov and A. Mukhin note that already in the 18th century, Yaroslavl was imperial Russia's major industrial centre. In the early 1990s, they note, "Yaroslavl' became a second after N. Novgorod Mecca for foreigners, the showcase of reforms of provincial Russia"; and a "bastion of democracy" (Petrov and Mukhin 1998, pp. 993, 995). As Putin consolidated power and sought to undermine regional

political pluralism by subordinating regional assemblies to loyalists affiliated with the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, Yaroslavl surprised even seasoned observers of regional politics by electing an opposition-supported candidate Yevgeniy Urlashov. Urlashov boasted a law degree from Yaroslavl University, one of the country's oldest higher educational establishments and a successor to the Demidov School of Higher Sciences (*Demidovskoye uchilishche vysshikh nauk)* founded in 1803 during the reign of Alexander I. Nemtsov would subsequently courageously publicly defend Urlashov when he became subject to politically-motivated prosecution. Alexander Kynev, a leading expert on regional electoral politics referred to Ulrashov's victory as among "the most stunning successes of the opposition in regional and local elections in Russia in recent years."[9] Other commentators likewise singled out Yaroslavl' as an unusual example of how "the opposition, by uniting forces and capabilities, may not just calmly, but convincingly win in the elections—here, in Putin's Russia, now, in the first year of Putin's third term."[10] It is in Yaroslavl' in 2013, that Nemtsov likewise impressed observers of regional politics by winning one seat in the regional assembly as lead candidate from The Party of People's Freedom, formerly Republican Party of Russia (RPR-PARNAS) declaring that "the freeing of the country from swindlers and thieves will start here in Yaroslavl"; and that "the dismembering of the Putin regime will start at the regional level."[11]

Discussion

The account presented above alerts us to the phenomenon of inter-temporal reproduction of particular regional societal microcosms that have endured decades of communist rule and continue to survive under the current authoritarian system. Where, then, does the agency of a transformational leader like Boris Nemtsov fit into this account? The concept of *appropriation* introduced earlier in the essay is useful here because it highlights how rationalist and adaptive impulses can dictate accommodation to a new regime by members of the past order that one would not expect to embrace the new regime. There remains, however,

[9] Alexander Kynev, "Voyna i mir: Prichiny i posledstviya ataki na Yevgeniya Urlashova," *Forbes* (Russia) 4 July 2013. http://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/vertikal/241665-voina-i-mer-prichiny-i-posledstviya-ataki-na-evgeniya-urlashova (accessed 23 December 2015).
[10] Stanislav Belkovskiy, "Net vybora, krome vyborov," MKRU, 5 April 2012, http://www.mk.ru/politics/2012/04/05/689843-net-vyibora-krome-vyiborov.html (accessed 23 December 2015).
[11] "Boris Nemtsov ofitsial'no stal deputatom Yaroslavskoy obldumy," *FederalPress*, 25 September 2013. http://fedpress.ru/news/polit_vlast/news_polit/1380081577-boris-nemtsov-ofitsialno-stal-deputatom-yaroslavskoi-obldumy (accessed 23 December 2015).

a minority, that will resist such impulses. As noted in this discussion, many educated members of the tsarist regime ended up joining the communist party, some even becoming true believers in the process. Likewise, we observe how many a prominent *perestroika*-era democrat or democratic commentator has now morphed into a tacit or even active and vocal apologist for the Putin regime. Fear, survival instincts, or perhaps a genuine change of political orientation would perhaps account for the remarkable metamorphosis of an apparently democratic leader into an endorser of Putin's political propaganda; or a former liberal TV commentator into a host of a kitsch show on TV Rossiya.

I have noted how some social/ professional strata—even under a far more ideologically-indoctrinated and repressive—soviet—environment than the one found in present-day Russia—had been more likely to resist such forms of appropriation, and that perhaps an element of self-selection may have been at work in that those most principled and independent-minded would have navigated their way into a safe haven of sanity and moral integrity. Together, these individuals constitute the moral core of an apparently demoralised society, and represent the hope for change. Here it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the long-forgotten polemic between Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Dobson, on the one hand, and Martin Mailia, on the other. Writing in the early 1970s, at the height of Communism in Russia, Lipset and Dobson sought to identify the common features shared by the non-conformist academic milieus in contexts as diverse as the United States and the Soviet Union. From amongst the educated strata, they distinguish specifically the "critical intelligentsia." They write:

> The critical intelligentsia is composed of those who not only have the ability to manipulate symbols with expertise, but who have also gained a reputation for commitment to general values and who have a broad evaluative outlook derived from such commitment. The characteristic orientation of these "generalizing intellectuals" is a critically evaluative one, a tendency to appraise in terms of general conceptions of the desirable, ideal conceptions which are thought to be universally applicable. Such generalizing intellectuals have been described by Lewis Coser as follows: Intellectuals exhibit in their activities a pronounced concern with the core values of society. They are the men who seek to provide moral standards and to maintain meaningful general symbols . . . Intellectuals are men who never seem satisfied with things as they are, with appeals to custom and usage. They question the truth of the moment in terms of higher and wider truth; they counter appeals to factuality by invoking the "impractical

> ought." They consider themselves special custodians of abstract ideas like reason and justice and truth, jealous guardians of moral standards that are too often ignored in the market place and the houses of power.

Lipset and Dobson identify America's and the USSR's leading centres of academic research as the repositories and the producers of the critical intellectual. In the USSR, some examples of such hubs that they find notable in particular are the Moscow area towns of Dubna and Obninsk, and the science town, the *Akademgorodok* in Novosibirsk, with its over twenty specialised scientific institutions. Even within America's top institutions, they argue, one finds those with an instinct to conserve the status quo. So it is also with Soviet centres of scientific innovation where the mediocre not unfrequently labour alongside the brilliant and the critical-minded. Nevertheless, it is within such leading spatial clusters of the production of knowledge that Lipset and Dobson saw strong potential for the germination of values ultimately corrosive of the Soviet regime. "While such settlements may serve to isolate scientists and scholars from the rest of the population, they also seem to afford a fertile setting for the gestation of critical thought, and they clearly pose new obstacles to the party's persistent efforts to maintain ideological controls," they write (p. 161). In a response to Lipset and Dobson's essay, Malia begged to disagree. The natural sciences, he argued, could be indeed singled out for relative non-conformism against the overall background of the "flat quality of Soviet intellectual life" (p. 214). Yet, the critical intellectual who, like Andrei Sakharov, would dare to challenge the political system appears in Malia's essay as more of an exception, not the rule in Soviet research establishments, while the picture of the general structure of USSR academia is presented in his essay as one that arguably discourages the germination of the kinds of critical faculties that may be characteristic of centres of research and innovation in some other settings.

History, of course, proved Lipset and Dobson's observations to be more prophetic than those of Malia's. Not only did many academic intellectuals contribute to the democratisation—and ultimate collapse—of the Soviet system (Brown 1996), but, as any scholar of post-Soviet Russian regional politics would testify, it is the regions that had been hubs of knowledge production like Novosibirsk, Nizhniy, or St. Petersburg that have consistently ranked high in democratic ratings over the last twenty five years, and therefore could be considered as possessing latent potential for confronting the national political regime much like the science towns did during the Soviet period.

What is particularly important about the observations of Lipset and Dobson, and indeed those of Malia when he discusses the origins of the Russian intelligentsia, is the emphasis on the "pronounced concern with the core values of society," rather than on the production of new knowledge per se. By many accounts, Nemtsov had been a first rate scientist.[12] As vividly described by his press-secretary, he was no book-worm though, and not someone who could anchor his polemics in high-brow philosophical, literary, or ethics debates (Dubovaya 2015). His political biography however is testimony to consistency in adherence to high principle and code of conduct in that he continued to be a democrat long when it ceased to be fashionable, expedient, lucrative, and safe. Nemtsov's life and political engagement is of course that of the *un*-appropriated—of the Soviet scientific intelligentsia that inherited the high moral credentials of its imperial antecedents—relatively immune to the pressures of daily reaffirmations of ideological dogma; and, later, during the times of Putinism, that of an almost quixotic figure, a romantic adhering to principles so at odds with the prevailing environment.

I have chosen to take a broad-brush historical approach to explain how historically, because of their advanced levels of human capital development, some regions of Russia have tended to become both producers of the intelligentsia in the highest sense of the term, but also to attract—as refuge-seekers from other regions—the non-conformist, the sceptic, and the critical-minded. Putin's federal recentralization drive, his neglect of Russia's research and academic establishments, and the cultivation of an atmosphere of intolerance for political dissent are gradually chipping away at what remains of the "custodians" of high moral principle. Will such islands of democratic obstinacy survive in Russia? If the record of the decades of resilience of regional hubs of human capital that strides the imperial and communist periods is any guide, I would answer that question in the affirmative. Yet, we also know that it would take the agency of a new Boris Nemtsov to inspire and mobilise these latent forces.

[12]"Nuzhen pamyatnik Borisu Nemtsovu," *Radio Svoboda*, 7 April 2015. http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/26942688.html (accessed 3 July 2015).

Appendix: Table 1. Regional democracy (Petrov-Titkov composite score for 1991-2001) and imperial-era literacy, 1897 census. Note: Regions are sorted based on highest-to-lowest democracy scores.

Region	*Democracy, 1991-01*	*Literacy*	*Female Literacy*
St. Petersburg	45	62.6	51.5
Sverdlovskaya	43	19.2	10.8
Karelia	41	25.3	10
Perm	41	19.2	10.8
Nizhniy Novgorod	40	22	11.1
Arkhangelsk	37	23.3	11.7
Irkutsk	37	15.2	7.6
Novosibirsk	37	10.4	4.3
Samara	37	22.1	14.1
Yaroslavl	37	36.2	24
Chelyabinsk	34	20.4	11.4
Volgograd	34	23.8	13.6
Krasnoyarsk	33	13.6	6.7
Sakhalin	33	26.8	12.5
Udmurtia	33	16	7.5
Leningradskaya	32	55.1	43.8
Vologda	32	19.1	6.7
Chuvashiya	31	17.9	11.1
Kostroma	31	24	12.3
Buryatiya	30	13.4	3.8
Moscow (City)	30	56.3	42.3
Murmansk	30	23.3	11.7
Novgorod	30	23	10.7
Tyumen	30	11.3	5
Ivanovo	29	27	13.4
Kaluga	29	19.4	8.6
Kamchatka	29	24.7	8.2
Khakassiya	29	13.6	6.7
Kirov	29	16	7.5
Moscow (Obl.)	29	40.2	25.5
Omsk	29	10.4	4.3
Tomsk	29	10.4	4.3
Vladimir	29	27	13.4
Altai (Rep.)	28	10.4	4.3
Astrakhan	28	15.5	8.1
Belgorod	28	16.3	6.6
Bryansk	28	17.6	7.3
Kemerovo	28	10.4	4.3
Mariy El	28	16	7.5
Tver	28	24.5	11.9
Komi	27	23.3	11.7

Lipetsk	27	16.6	6.9
Pskov	27	14.6	7.2
Ryazan	27	20.3	8.2
Smolensk	27	17.3	7.1
Amur	26	24.8	11.9
Krasnodar	26	16.8	6.6
Magadan	26	24.8	11.9
Orenburg	26	20.4	11.4
Saratov	26	23.8	13.6
Tambov	26	16.6	6.9
Tula	26	20.7	8.9
Altay (Kray)	25	10.4	4.3
Chita	25	13.4	3.8
Khabarovskiy	25	24.8	11.9
Penza	25	14.7	6.3
Stavropol	25	14.4	6.2
Voronezh	25	16.3	6.4
Dagestan	24	9.2	2.5
Karachaevo-Cherkessiya	24	16.8	6.6
Kurgan	24	11.3	5
Rostov	24	22.4	9.8
Jewish	23	24.8	11.9
Primorskiy	23	24.7	8.2
Tatarstan	23	17.9	11.1
Adygeya	22	16.8	6.6
Ulyanovsk	22	15.6	6.6
Kursk	21	16.3	6.6
Mordovia	21	14.7	6.3
Orel	21	17.6	7.3
Sakha	21	4.1	1.7
North Ossetia	19	12.7	6
Bashkortostan	18	16.7	11.7
Chukotka	17	24.7	8.2
Kabardino-Balkariya	17	12.7	6
Ingushetiya	15	12.7	6
Kalmykiya	14	15.5	8.1

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